DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 278 030 CS 210 253

AUTHOR Berner, R. Thomas
TITLE Literary Newswriting: The Death of an Oxymoron. Journalism Monographs Number 99.
INSTITUTION Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.
PUB DATE Oct 86
NOTE 33p.
AVAILABLE FROM Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, College of Journalism, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208 ($5.00, single issue).
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Journalism; *Literary Devices; *Literary Styles; *New Journalism; *News Reporting; *News Writing; Writing Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS *Literary Newswriting

ABSTRACT

Claiming that literary newswriting is not a contradiction in terms, that is, an oxymoron, this essay examines some of the criteria against which literary newswriting can be measured, defines what constitutes literary newswriting in contemporary newspapers, and explains how it contributes to modern newswriting. The paper argues that (1) modern journalists should no longer categorize stories as hard news, feature, or literary feature because the complexity of life necessitates a variety of writing approaches; and (2) literary newswriting is no less truthful than "objective" journalism and may, in fact, represent reality more accurately than standard newswriting forms. To find out more about the writing styles and reporting methods of literary newswriters, the following stories and reporters are examined: "The Illegal Odyssey of Don Bernabe Garay" (J. M. Crewdson); "Farmers Harvest Fruit of Bountiful Summer" (Mike Sager); "A Job Where Nobody Complains" (Paul Shinoff); "The Suspect: From a Lonely Childhood to a D. C. Jail" (D. C. Drake); "It Was a Day the Brave Men Cried" (D. Wolf); "A Fire on the Mountain: The Story of the Kintzel Brothers" (G. Gaul); "Brutality in the Home: Abused Child Strikes Back" (P. Donahue); and "Egyptians Excluded in Sorrow" (R. B. Cramer). Over 100 end notes are provided. (JD)

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JOURNALISM
MONOGRAPHS
Number 99 October 1986

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Literary Newswriting

The Death of an Oxymoron

R. Thomas Berner

CS 210253

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JOURNALISM MONOGRAPHS was supported for its first two years by a gift from the University of Texas, and until 1979 by the American Association of Schools and Departments of Journalism.

Most editions of JOURNALISM MONOGRAPHS are still in print and may be ordered from the Association. Microform and photocopies are also available through University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106. Please indicate series number, author and title when ordering single copies.

Monographs appearing here are regularly abstracted and indexed in *Historical Abstracts*, *America: History and Life* and *Resources in Education*.

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POSTMASTER: Send address correction form to AEJMC, 1621 College St., University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208-0251.

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JOURNALISM MONOGRAPHS

Number 99 October 1986

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R. THOMAS BERNER

Literary Newswriting: The Death of an Oxymoron

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Accepted for Publication February 1986

R. THOMAS BERNER is Associate Professor of Communication at Pennsylvania State University in University Park, Pennsylvania. He wishes to acknowledge the work of Sally Atwood, who helped gather material for this essay, and Thomas F. Magner, Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies in the College of Liberal Arts at Penn State, who provided funding.

Journalism is actually the last great unexplored literary frontier.
— Truman Capote[1]

MORE THAN A DECADE AGO, Ronald Weber, writing about new journalism, observed almost parenthetically that "the other basic strain at work in the new journalism is more strictly journalistic," a comment he explained in a footnote. "This side of new journalism, keeping thoughts about art and rivalry with fiction in the background and concentrating more on loosening up rigid journalistic attitudes and practices, has lacked a spokesman of [Tom] Wolfe's zeal and stature and consequently tends to be of less importance," he wrote. "But this could be deceptive. It could be that in the long run, the literary new journalists, having switched (or switched back) to writing old novels, the less publicized changes at work in newspaper and magazine journalism will have the more lasting effect."[2] Weber was right, although the type of newspaper writing/reporting I call literary newswriting hasn't exactly dominated the front pages of newspapers.

Some would argue that literary newswriting is a subset of feature writing rather than a separate entity. I would argue that modern journalists should no longer categorize stories as hard news or feature or literary feature, but should recognize that given the complex nature of life, the modern journalist needs a variety of writing approaches to satisfactorily explain the world to readers. This essay examines some of the criteria against which literary newswriting in newspapers can be measured, defines what constitutes literary newswriting in contemporary newspapers, and explains how it contributes to modern

newswriting. This essay contends that literary newswriting is not a contradiction in terms, i.e., an oxymoron.

Further, this essay argues that literary newswriting is no less truthful than "objective" journalism and may, in fact, more accurately represent reality than standard newswriting forms. Says Tracy Kidder: "Some people have a very clinical notion of what journalism is. It's an antiseptic idea, the idea that you can't present a set of facts in an interesting way without tainting them. That's utter nonsense. That's the ultimate machine-like tendency."[3] This essay does not take up the question of whether literary newswriting is art. I have argued elsewhere that literary styled newswriting is not art.[4]

Instead, this essay focuses primarily on technique with an aside look at reporting. It first argues that literary newswriting is possible and then examines how modern journalists are accomplishing it. In the words of the editors of *A Treasury of Great Reporting*, ". . . to have staying power great reporting must possess literary quality."[5] This essay examines the staying power of eight news stories, relying in part on the advice of Wayne C. Booth. "But we gain one great glory from the irreducible complexities and fluidities in literary studies: any one of us, at any age and in any state of ignorance, can practice the art, not just learn about it from other people's practice. Each of us can work at what is always the frontier of the art of narrative and its study: a story-loving mind meeting a story that asks to be loved."[6]

In trying to find stories that might fit the topic of this essay, I used the Pennsylvania State University's main library, which subscribes to almost thirty non-Pennsylvania metropolitan newspapers and an equal number of Pennsylvania dailies. The following newspapers were examined during a three-month period in the fall of 1981: *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *San Francisco Examiner* (and their Sunday combination), *Denver Post*, *Washington Post*, *Miami Herald*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *New Orleans Times*, *Picayune/States-Item*, *Baltimore Sun*, *Boston Globe*, *Detroit News*, *Minneapolis Tribune*, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Houston Post*, *Seattle Times*, *Milwaukee Journal*, the *Allentown* (Pennsylvania) *Morning Call*, the *Philadelphia Bulletin* (since deceased), and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. I avoided the *New York Times* because I already had a story from that newspaper, in fact it was the story that initially triggered my research on the use of literary techniques in newspaper writing. Except for Allentown, all the cities rank in the top fifty in population.[7]

My assistant, who was working on her master's degree in English literature, examined the newspapers for literarily styled news stories. I recruited in the English department because I was afraid that a graduate student in journalism would bring to the search the old bias that the inverted pyramid is the only form a newspaper story can take. My assistant was instructed to examine front pages and section fronts of the designated newspapers, but she understood that the articles I wanted had to be as close to hard news (current events) as possible, meaning that stories in feature (lifestyle/living/leisure/people) sections got scant attention. All in all, my assistant provided fifteen stories for

my consideration. We agreed that four of them fit the mold. A friend provided still another story and I "discovered" yet another while conducting a writing workshop for the Pennsylvania Society of Newspaper Editors. I read about still another in Gannett's house magazine, *Gannetteer*, and I saw the eighth during my normal daily newspaper reading.

I wanted stories which demonstrated that literary techniques have come out of the closet called the feature section and can now be found in stories on page one. I wanted stories that might be said to combine what Michael Schudson describes as the two journalisms of the 1890s — story and information, in which story journalism entertains and interprets while information journalism provides data (election results, stock market reports, etc.).[8] My assistant and I examined stories for their use of literary techniques, among them narration and scene, summary and process, point of view, drama, chronological organization, rhythm, imagery, foreshadowing, metaphor, irony, dialogue, overall organization (beginning, middle and end) plus verification and documentation, the elements of good reporting.

I then asked each literary newswriter a set of fairly standard questions in order to elicit background on writing style and reporting methods. I also questioned facts and asked reporters how they documented some of their information. The stories and reporters ultimately analyzed are:

- "The Illegal Odyssey of Don Bernabe Garay," by John M. Crewdson, the *New York Times*.[9]

(John M. Crewdson, a national correspondent for the *New York Times*, received his editor's permission to spend a year writing about illegal immigration in America. In that year [1980], Crewdson wrote more than forty stories on the smuggling of humans across the Mexican border, the travels of Cuban refugees, on migrant camps, border jails, Chicago sweatshops and corruption among United States immigration authorities. The stories spurred an investigation and policy review by the Justice Department. Even before Crewdson began the series, he had made friends in the Arizona Farmworkers Union who vouched for him when he was looking for illegal aliens to write about. He met the subject of this story that way. This particular story took Crewdson three weeks, which included reporting, solving logistical problems and waiting for the aliens to assemble. For the entire series, Crewdson won a Pulitzer Prize for national reporting.)

- "Farmers Harvest Fruit Of Bountiful Summer," by Mike Sager, the *Washington Post*.[10]

(The first cool day of fall reminded a *Washington Post* editor that it was time for a change-of-season story, a traditional piece at many newspapers. "Rather than writing about how all the bureaucrats changed their cotton pin-stripes for ones of wool, [the editor] thought it would be interesting to explore the change of seasons in an environment where man is conscious of nature, where the relationship between the two is a vital factor," Mike Sager says. Sager went to Culpeper, Virginia, and eventually to the farm of Greg and Doris Smith. Sager spent two days reporting the story and at least two days writing. The resulting story was published in tandem with another about the changing season in

Maryland and underneath a photograph from the Smith farm.)

• "A Job Where Nobody Complains," by Paul Shinoff, the *San Francisco Examiner*.[11]

(When Paul Shinoff, the labor writer at the *San Francisco Examiner*, proposed a series of stories on "so-called common everyday jobs," he says he did not expect that one of the series would be about gravediggers. He had first wanted to write about an embalmer and then professional pallbearers, but rejected both for various reasons. He settled on gravedigger, an uncommon job because, as Shinoff notes, many graves are dug with backhoes. He finally found the subjects of this story at an old church cemetery. The cemetery was perfect because, Shinoff says, "I was looking for Irish diggers; they are great colorful talkers. I worked as a member of a predominately Irish Carpenters' Union here [San Francisco] for eight years, and that lesson was not lost on me." Other job types in the series called "Punchin' In" were a fry cook, supermarket checker, locomotive engineer, telephone operator, bartender and bridge toll-taker.)

• "The Suspect: From a Lonely Childhood to a D.C. Jail," by Donald C. Drake, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.[12]

(Within two hours of an attempted assassination of President Ronald Reagan, a team of reporters and a primary writer at the *Philadelphia Inquirer* began collecting information for a comprehensive story on the man accused of the crime. Approximately forty-eight hours later, the work of thirteen reporters and some wire service reporters had been shaped into a narrative by Donald C. Drake, the *Inquirer's* medical writer. Drake, who spent approximately eight hours writing the story, used his pre-writing time to organize the reporter's notes so that the narrative he produced would have at the outset a tension to propel the reader through to the story's end. Drake realized that the readers would know how the story ended so he sought to retain their interest by showing what the accused did. This is a story of how something happened, not why. The story occupied approximately three full newspaper pages.)

• "It Was a Day the Brave Men Cried," by Doris Wolf, *Finger Lakes Times*, Geneva, New York.[13]

(This is the story of the funeral of a New York State police officer who was killed while serving as an undercover narcotics investigator. He was the first trooper in five years to be killed in the line of duty. Doris Wolf, then a stringer at the *Finger Lakes Times* in Geneva, New York, was assigned to cover the funeral. She spent eight hours covering the funeral then wrote two stories — the funeral for page one and a sidebar, which was analyzed for this essay. Prior to the funeral, she had been told "that a cop's funeral would be an intense emotional experience, and I had 'tuned up' all my senses, ready to absorb as much detail as I could. Coming upon the funeral scene and seeing the massed battalions of policemen standing in the street set the tone of the day." Instead of standing in one place, Wolf wandered about. "My editor always seems to have a question about the one thing I didn't include and I wanted to be sure I observed every detail." She watched the police officers file past the open casket. "I looked carefully at their faces. I wanted to see why these men came,

what this experience meant to them, so I could put some meaning into it for those who weren't there." She also talked to some of the police officers outside the funeral home. Then she returned home. "The experiencing was done on one day, and the story put on paper the next.")

• "A Fire on the Mountain: The Story of the Kintzel Brothers," by Gilbert Gaul, the *Pottsville* (Pennsylvania) *Republican*.[14]

(This story was a long time coming. Gilbert M. Gaul conceived of the idea almost two years before the story appeared. In between, Gaul changed jobs, went from covering crime and corruption in the anthracite coal mines of Pennsylvania to reporting about the casinos in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The miners involved in this story kept in touch, and Gaul did some research on mine inspections. When the federal government was not forthright enough, he obtained some of his information through the Freedom of Information Act. A year after conceiving the story, he decided to write it in a magazine format and find a publisher later. Thus, the story was written before Gaul returned to his old newspaper, the *Pottsville Republican* which published it as a tabloid insert without advertising.)

• "Brutality in the Home: Abused Child Strikes Back," by Pat Donahue, the *Stockton* (California) *Record*.[15]

(Looking around for a major community project to write about and concerned with the crime rate in their hometown, the executive editor and the editor of the editorial page of the *Stockton Record* decided to explore the city's crime problem. The result was a five-part series written by Patricia A. Donahue, a general assignment reporter, and Eric B. Best, the editor of the editorial page. Early in developing the series, the various editors involved decided to use case studies packaged with statistics and with commentary from twenty-five social, legal, business, religious, education and government leaders. The case studies appeared on one page; the statistics and commentary on a second — something akin to Schudson's two journalisms. "Our hope was to give the reader a mix of approaches and have faith that the 'truth' about crime would reside in the combination of methods for delivering information," Best says. "The fictionalized tone of the writing, with names changed but otherwise documented from interviews and the public record, was employed to promote greater reader interest and give the reporter more stylistic room in which to capture the sense of the story.")

• "Egyptians Excluded in Sorrow," by Richard Ben Cramer, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.[16]

(The funeral for assassinated Egyptian president Anwar el-Sadat was attended by 800 leaders from eighty nations, including three former United States presidents. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* combined information from its wire services to provide the main coverage of the funeral, but relied on one of its international correspondents, Richard Ben Cramer, for special coverage. Cramer, who spent twenty hours reporting and writing, produced a story of Sadat's funeral as seen through the eyes of Egyptians who could not attend because their leaders kept them away. Cramer says he chose not to join the main body of journalists because they were kept together at one spot and got only one view.

Cramer wanted the reaction of the people. With his approach, he came up with a different point of view of the funeral. Cramer says he tries to develop the character of people in his reporting. He says he wants to hear people speaking. Because his editor is not in the room, Cramer says he reads his copy carefully and challenges unclear statements. He tries to anticipate his editor's questions about holes in his story. He calls the approach "Scrooge reading," and says: "I try to come back at myself as though the editor were there.")

(The eight newspaper stories cited are too long to be reproduced here. Copies are available from the author at 1B Carnegie, University Park, Pa. 16802.)

A Definition of Literary Newswriting

Today's literary newswriting in newspapers has its roots in the new journalism movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. But that doesn't mean that literary newswriting is something new. Literature and journalism have co-existed for at least four centuries. Says Lennard J. Davis: "The main form of journalism in the sixteenth century was the printed ballad. . . . The printed ballad was basically journalistic — which is to say, more likely to be read immediately after the event reported than the ballad of a wandering minstrel, which might recount exploits of the more distant past, and be sung months or years after its composition."[17] James E. Murphy emphasized that journalists used literary techniques more than three centuries ago.[18]

Davis rues the separation that eventually befell literature and journalism, noting that "the history of the subsequent division of fact and fiction, news and novel, the movement from untroubled fictionality of Cervantes to the inherent ambivalence of Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, and later writers, the objectification of factual news and the factualizing of fictionality — all can tell us much about the way we now consider the social and political role of narrative, journalism, and history."[19] Subsequently, scholars would not recognize the literary aspects of journalism until late in the nineteenth century.[20] That century does provide an array of examples of literary newswriting, as attested to in *A Treasury of Great Reporting*.[21]

Literary journalism has obviously been with us for centuries. What we see today is perhaps only a polished and sophisticated version of what was done many times during the past four centuries. Today's literary newswriting reflects the process of evolution in all newswriting. "It is clear that New Journalism is not new," Murphy said. "What is now billed as a literary genre is the product of gradual development and a reflection of the times more than it is a radical innovation."[22] For the purposes of this essay, though, to understand current literary newswriting is to first know what scholars, writers and critics consider new journalism circa 1970.

New journalism emphasizes style over substance.[23] John Hollowell says it is "a form of nonfiction that relies upon the narrative techniques and intuitive insights of the novelist to chronicle contemporary

events."[24] Weber emphasizes the same point. "When Wolfe talks about finding 'artistic' excitement in journalism he has in mind one such strain — the effort to draw literary effect from nonfiction materials, to render literature from reporting, art from fact."[25] In literary newswriting, though, reporting is as much of the essence as is writing style.

In analyzing the evolution of literary newswriting, too much should not be made of that type of newspaper writing called feature. One literary newswriter, Mike Sager of the *Washington Post*, makes the distinction this way: "By traditional standards, a feature is a collection of quotes, strung together with somewhat simple transition paragraphs. The detail is sparse and usually limited to stock (what they're wearing, how they sigh, etc.) and the result is a flat story. I've heard this type called a Talking Head story; it reads as if the reporter had collected the heads of his characters, thrown them into a white room, and turned on the tape recorder."[26] Hollowell makes much the same point. "In the usual news story, the basic units are facts and quotations."[27] He differentiates between standard journlaism and the new journalism by saying that new journalists attempt to reconstruct a news event as it might have happened. "The new journalists uses literary techniques to convey information and to provide background not usually possible in most newspaper and magazine reporting."[28] The point is not new. Two decades before anyone used the phrase new journalism, John Hersey wrote: "Journalism allows its readers to witness history; fiction gives its readers an opportunity to live it."[29] A combination of those in a newspaper results in literary newswriting. Literary newswriting represents a reporter's attempt to present reality by using techniques usually associated with fiction. The literary newswriter seeks the realism achieved by the novelist.

In what is thought of as typical newspaper writing, the inverted pyramid, or retrograde style, holds sway, and it has a virtue. It conveys information briefly and quickly. It is utilitarian and functional. It lets the reader pick his own stopping-off point. If the first paragraph provides enough information, the reader can go on to another story. If the reader wants more, the reader can keep reading until satiated. But the inverted pyramid is a reality in the newsroom only, an institutional reality clearly bearing little relationship to the reality of a news event, or, for that matter, life. A news event does not unfold with who, what, why, when, where and how in the opening scene, does not begin with the main point and fade to the insignificant. But that is the way most journalists usually write stories about events. On the other hand, literary newswriters, by melding the legwork of reporting, the art of writing, and the techniques of fiction writing, may actually get closer to reality than their counterparts using the inverted pyramid — a point I'll return to.

In discussing fiction, Leon Surmelian argues that "good writing is passionate writing, but with its passion controlled, dispassionate passion."[30] That also applies to literary newswriting it seems so effortless as not to be obvious to the reader. Furthermore, the literary newswriter recognizes that the news is frequently cyclical and that in some cases only the way the news is written makes one story unique

from another. "The raw material of human existence remains ever the same, the molds by which it is given significance and recognizable shape are forever being recreated by writers of empirical narrative and drama," say Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg. "The new in empirical narrative depends upon an originality of vision, a creation of new types of actuality, and not upon a flight of the imagination away from the actual."[31] If there is any art to be found in literary newswriting, Scholes and Kellogg say "it is in the knowing and the telling, and not in the facts. . . "[32] As Louis M. Lyons put it: ". . . the effectiveness of the reporting is capped by the writing. Its quality may lift a good story to a great one or reduce it to run of the mill."[33]

Narrative Approaches

Andre Fontaine says this about using narrative in newswriting: "Narrative is one of the things a good interpretive writer borrows from fiction writers. It is telling a story, building suspense, putting your characters (and the reader) into a situation, then taking him through it, complete with emotional involvements, to a resolution. It's not changing facts, but arranging them. It is plotting."[34] When newspaper editors talk about non-journalistic writing in newspapers, one method that is much mentioned is the narrative form, in which a story and a story-teller are evident.[35] What editors do not mention is that the narrative comes with a point of view,[36] and point of view means to an editor the loss of a reporter's neutrality. But those objections should be quickly dismissed, for no newspaper story, no matter the form, is devoid of point of view. The journalist's selection of information is a point of view that the journalist (often unconsciously) brings to a story merely through unrecognized cultural bias. That does not necessarily diminish the journalist's work. Surmelian, writing about fiction, sees point of view as something to acknowledge, not hide:

> The perception of the world around him through sense data and insight and an awareness of the world within himself, of consciousness observing itself, the outer vision combined with the inner: that is what distinguishes the writer, and he stands or falls on his capacity for sense impressions and his imaginative insights, and on his ability to express them in words. If he is honest, he will neither exaggerate nor minimize what he perceives, he will not fake it, he will not say something exists when it does not or deny that which exists. He will not knowingly misinterpret the facts as he knows them and mislead the reader. A good narrative prose is language that tells the truth and makes for a lucid presentation of the event.[37]

Surmelian, in fact, helps define literary newswriting (without saying so) as the "objective re-creation of experience. . . realized through subjective means."[38]

For the journalist, literary point of view means deciding from which perspective a story is told. The perspective can be that of the reporter's — neutral omniscience. But it can also be the central character's or

someone close to the central character. Roy Peter Clark cites as one such example Charles Bailey's story on the funeral of Medgar Evers, a civil rights leader slain in 1963. The story, written for the *Minneapolis Tribune*, begins:

> ARLINGTON, VA. — The humid haze of early summer lay hot and heavy on Washington, D.C., but here across the river, under the oak trees, the air was fresh and cool.
>
> The little girl sat on a folding chair, her mother on one side and her older brother on the other. The child's face was blank and bemused, almost dazed. Around her stood a thousand others. Closer in, a score of men with cameras crept and scuttled and snapped their shutters at her.[39]

The little girl is Evers' daughter, and the story will be told from her point of view. "To experience this event through her eyes," Clark argues, "is to feel its full significance."[40] What point of view offers then is not weaker writing, but stronger writing, for it gives a journalist the opportunity to let the reader experience the event as its participants are experiencing it rather than filtered through the inverted pyramid.

Crewdson's story — "The Illegal Odyssey of Don Bernabe Garay" — represents this approach. His article, one of a series on immigration, focuses on the life of Don Bernabe Garay, a Mexican who slips in and out of Arizona to pick lemons. The story is told from the viewpoint of Bernabe Garay, beginning with one of his illegal entries into the United States and ending with him at work on another day. In the words of one reference book, Crewdson's story is a short story because it "focuses on a single character in a single episode, and, rather than tracing his development, reveals him at a particular moment."[41]

The narrative approach needs to be distilled further because literary newswriters use a variety of approaches in telling a story. One major distinction arises in the tense of the action. Read says that narrative can describe events that are taking place or that have taken place.[42] Journalism is about current events and most journalists write their stories in the past tense. When journalists need to distinguish between past and the more distant past, they rely on the past perfect verb tense. The past/past perfect division works fine in literary newswriting. But other literary newswriters write in the present tense, mostly because they want to distinguish between "now" (actually recently) and the past. They see a sharper distinction when time is broken along present-past lines than past-past perfect. Furthermore, a story in the present tense shows the process of a news event, a point that will be detailed shortly.

The different narrative approaches lead to still another distinguishing characteristic in literary newswriting, the distinction between narration and scene. Surmelian describes narration as "Paul reading the paper in the college library when Mary came from behind him and blindfolded him with her hands." For that incident to become a scene: "Paul was reading the paper in the college library when he felt two feminine hands blindfold him from behind, and as he pulled the hands away from his eyes and looked up over his shoulder he saw it was Mary."[43] To Surmelian, the second example is present action (not to be confused with present

tense) because the reader sees how something happened, sees the process. "The scene reproduces the movement of life," Surmelian says, "and life is action, motion."[44] The first example, on the other hand, describes an action that has already occurred.

Sager's story — "Farmers Harvest Fruit of Bountiful Summer" — exemplifies the use of the present tense and scene to turn a simple story about the change of seasons into a highly readable profile of a life on a farm in Culpeper, Virginia. The lead typifies Sager's style throughout — the immediacy of the present tense and the vivid description put the reader in Greg Smith's barn:

> The dawn is chill inside the barn, and Greg Smith's breath hangs in the air like puffs from a hand-rolled smoke. A Holstein stands motionless before him, and he strokes the cow's black and white face with a rough, stained hand. A few steps away, the sun outlines the open barn door on the earth, and there summer lingers, warm to the skin.

The present tense, in Surmelian's view, may increase a story's poetic value.[45] Sager's use of description affirms a comment made early in the century by Remy de Gourmont. "If there were an art of writing, it would be nothing more or less than the art of feeling, the art of seeing, the art of hearing, the art of using all the senses, whether directly or through imagination; and the new, serious method of a theory of style would be an attempt to show how these two separate worlds — the world of sensations and the world of words — penetrate each other."[46] Sager says: "Because the story was meant to convey the feeling — as well as the pace and specifics — of all on the farm, the piece lent itself easily to description of nature."

Narration and scene are also more than a choice between summary and process but also take into consideration point of view. The journalist using scene instead of narration can choose one news subject's point of view (Paul's in Surmelian's example) over others and must bring to the scene a host of confirmations that the scene actually occurred that way. It is not enough, then, to examine a piece of literary newswriting for its technique alone; the reporting method, the documentation, must also be examined.

The narrative approach to newspaper writing offers the journalist an opportunity to enhance the story's usefulness to the reader. The historian who uses the narrative approach, according to Savoie Lottinville, turns "abruptly from the importance of his episode — the *what* which emerged from research and conceptualization — to the even more exciting *how* of telling it as it happened."[47] For the journalist, the *what* of any news event can be a fuzzy theme that does not emerge in a daily context but can be left only to historians who have the time to look at all aspects of the event to determine its role in history. Telling *how* some news event unfolded is an important part of journalism and adapting a literary technique to tell it does not diminish the journalism. Consider this lead:

> John Fitzpatrick and Maurice Hickey begin their jobs as gravediggers at Holy Cross Cemetery at the crack of dawn [note

cliche]. They know which gravesite to begin work at because their assignments are written on a piece of yellow paper Fitzpatrick has in his pocket.

This is how Paul Shinoff really began "A Job Where Nobody Complains":

> The early-morning sun had barely cleared the top of the San Bruno mountains as John Fitzpatrick and Maurice Hickey trudged across the wet, well-manicured lawn of Holy Cross Cemetery, carrying shovels and spades.
>
> Fitzpatrick paused, took a folded yellow slip of paper from the pocket of his faded blue overalls and glanced at the name on the marble headstone.

Shinoff shows the process rather than a summary of the process. He shows how the two gravediggers work. The result is a more interesting story because the reader can watch the action unfold.

In sum, the narrative approach can be applied as a method of journalistic writing. The result mirrors history and realistic fiction in that it attempts to tell how something happened.[48] The narrative approach in journalism scorns the self of the writer for the drama of the event. Read says:

> We find the best narrative prose in ages when the epic spirit has prevailed, that is to say, in writers who have been more conscious of their theme than of their own feelings and opinions. The narrative is essentially addressed to an audience: it is not self-revelation or a self-expression. It is accurate reporting. It is therefore devoid of comment and the only point of view it represents is the point of view of an interested observer.[49]

Booth makes the same argument, urging the analyst not to dwell on the approach of a writer but the writer's trustworthiness. "If he is discovered to be untrustworthy," Boothe writes, "then the total effect of the work he relays to us is transformed."[50]

Journalism and History

The last several paragraphs have developed a parallel between journalism and history. On the basic level (reporting of current events), the parallel was drawn by the late Philip Graham of the *Washington Post* and *Newsweek*, who considered journalism the first rough draft of history.[51] History and literature have been drawing closer by aiming for many of the same sensations through the same techniques.[52]

"Both history and literature" Russell Nye says, "are records of internal and external experience. Both attempt to gain from experience some kind of insight into the quality, mood, tempo, and personality of life — not just the *fact* of the past but the *feel* of it, the total recreation of time and place that history and literature strive to embody."[53]

Enter literary newswriting. As the examples studied show, they are more than fact. The writers have aimed to capture the feel of events, and I predict that these stories or stories like them will appear in the bibliographies of future history books.

Lottinville itemizes what he believes is necessary for the "successful historical construction of the narrative kind . . " The ingredients are: setting, historical action developed "swiftly and economically through unremitting attention to the actors," narrative conventions, chronology as unfolding time rather than past, indirect discourse drawn from documents, and an intention "to recreate what did in fact take place at the time of the occurrence . . . Its concern is the now of history, not the was."[54] One such story is Donald C. Drake's recounting of some of the life of John W. Hinckley Jr., which builds to the moment when Hinckley attempts to assassinate President Reagan.

Other Elements

Drake's story contains drama and describes "life in motion."[55] Another description might be "slice of life" — a plotless narrative that shows a person at a particular juncture of his life. Nicolaus Mills points out that "the structure of a new journalistic story will, for example, tend to be based on a dramatic rather than a chronological narrative of events."[56] Drake, in fact, admits to structuring his story in a dramatic and suspenseful fashion by using movie-writing techniques.[57] His approach to writing has been recognized elsewhere. An article in *The Quill* about a story Drake wrote on AIDS includes this comment: "Drake got so close to his subjects that the researcher, the patient, and the patient's twin brother . . . became characters from a novel rather than sources for a story. To say that the story was about a man being treated for AIDS is to describe Moby Dick as a book about a whale."[58]

Drama brings with it scene,[59] which suggests that without either of those elements, literary newswriting cannot exist. In the new journalism, Wolfe talks "about the kind of comprehensive reporting that enables one to portray scene. . . ."[60] He adds: "When one moves from newspaper reporting to this new form of journalism . . . one discovers that the basic reporting unit is no longer the datum, the piece of information, but the scene, since most of the sophisticated strategies of prose depend upon scenes."[61] Here is where new journalists and literary newswriters separate. No good newspaper journalist would place scene over information; the journalist would use scene only to create what Surmelian calls "a sensory representation of reality," "painting in words."[62] Surmelian uses these phrases to describe writers who want to add "a spatial dimension to fiction,"[63] but the phrases also apply to literary newswriting. Still, scene does not take precedent over information in literary newswriting.

Drama and/or scene alone do not literary newswriting make. As J. Michael Sproule points out, some journalists use drama and/or scene as "credibility-boosting devices to enhance their message."[64] Sproule objects to the devices because they communicate "a feeling that the reporter is completely knowledgeable about the subject. . . . The use of minute detail adds believability to the reporter's overall conclusions."[65] Sproule's example comes from *Newsweek*, which unabashedly mixes fact and analysis. Literary newswriting avoids analysis, but does give infor-

mation on which the reader may base conclusions. As such, literary newswriters may use "credibility-boosting devices," but they may be just as common to standard journalistic writing.

Still, drama and scene have their place in literary newswriting. They function as defining factors both for the scholar attempting to decide if a story is literary newswriting and for the journalist who is deciding how to structure a story. If the event had no drama or if the reporter failed to uncover it or to learn what the event's scenes were, the journalist will no doubt decide to write the story in a more conventional form. Drama and scene work on two levels, and their absence can preclude a journalist from even attempting to produce literary newswriting.

At this point it is necessary to salvage chronology as an organizational device. Mills made more of drama than he did of chronology, but that was in describing new journalism. Literary newswriters can effectively use a chronological organization, especially if they follow Lottinville's advice to treat chronology as unfolding time rather than past time, as Sager does. Furthermore, as the literary newswriter attempts to describe the *how* of a news event, the implication always is that the journalist is also showing cause and effect. Frequently, though, that judgment — especially in the reconstruction of a recent news event — is difficult to make. The chronological pattern removes the burden of proof from the writer and puts it on the events. If the events do not show cause and effect, so be it.

Other elements not found in typical newswriting are part of literary newswriting. For example, unlike conventional journalists, literary newswriters not only use adjectives and adverbs, they need them to provide evocative and detailed description. An example is Doris Wolf's "It Was A Day the Brave Men Cried" — the story of the funeral of an undercover narcotics investigator shot in the line of duty. Two unrelated paragraphs demonstrate the point:

> The men wore the somber gray uniforms of the New York State Police, the blue of the Massachusetts State Police, the high brown leather laced up boots of the Rhode Island troopers, the crimson red jackets of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the earthy brown of the N.Y. State Department of Environmental Conservation . . .
>
> But mostly they walked briskly back into the outside world.

Many of the adjectives and adverbs are admittedly descriptive rather than evaluative, but taken as a whole they evoke more than mere description and would not find their way into the typical news story.

Any rhetorical device is allowed, and metaphor seems particularly useful in making a complex point simple. Because some literary newswriters take the role of external narrator, irony can appear, but it must come naturally from events and facts rather than appear as a statement by the narrator/reporter lest the reporter's neutral role be open to challenge. For example, in the *Inquirer* story on John W. Hinckley Jr., Drake presents irony by showing that Hinckley is the youngest child and then quoting a psychiatrist who says: "America's assassins have almost always been younger children in their families, and in most cases they

have had older brothers." Later in the story, Drake relates a scene in which Hinckley's father asks some members of a Christian organization to pray for his son. This occurs before the assassination attempt the readers already know about. As Booth explains: "There can be no dramatic irony, by definition, unless the author and audience can somehow share knowledge which the characters do not hold."[66] Drake does not label any facts as ironic or otherwise attempt to correlate them. He stays out of the story. The irony is left for the reader to discover.

Also, much has been made of the reporter showing how something happened — of showing process rather than summarizing it. Ideally, the process approach bares the facts for the reader to interpret, but it may also prolong a small point in a story. Thus, a literary newswriter deviates from the literary by using summary or exposition when it can tighten a story to make a secondary point quickly or give context to the main point. Summary is also useful, Booth writes, for ". . . events too insignificant to merit being dramatized."[67]

Shinoff relies on summary, as this extract shows. Shinoff is concluding a section describing two gravediggers in action. When the exposition is over, he will return to the men at work:

> Neither man is considering retirement. "What is an old man going to do when he quits work?" asked Hickey.
>
> "Lie around," answered Fitzpatrick with a grunt and a laugh.
>
> They dug steadily for two hours . . .
>
> The term "grave digger" is a misnomer — most such work is done by an operator of a $20,000 backhoe tractor, a task that takes no more than a half hour. Hand digging is necessary only in the older sections of cemeteries where machines cannot squeeze through a maze of tombstones.

Summary is necessary when the reporting dictates it. Function decides form.

Literary newswriting does not have to contain a lot of direct quotations and may be better without them. Direct quotations are useful when they show dialogue or make a point about a character in a story. Otherwise, they can impede the narrative flow because they become annoying digressions from the story line. In this regard, the diminished role of direct quotations contradicts the tenets of most journalistic writing and especially feature writing, which relies on a lot of "good quotes." Recall Sager's earlier criticism of a feature story as a "Talking Head story; it reads as if the reporter had collected the heads of his characters, thrown them into a white room, and turned on the tape recorder."

Literary newswriting leaves room for first-person narration. That does not mean advocacy journalism. It merely means letting the reader know that the reporter is part of the story. But excessive first person fails because it makes the story unfold around the journalist rather than the real subject. Gilbert Gaul's story on the coal miners — "A Fire on the Mountain: The Story of the Kintzel Brothers" — is the only story studied that contains the non-journalistic first person. "For this story to work, I thought it was important for me to play a role. Using the first person freed me to offer my impressions."[68] Says Surmelian: "Journeys into

the far corners of the world, strange adventures, are more exciting when narrated by those who made the trip and saw it all with their own eyes."[69]

Beginnings and endings need special care. The literary newspaper story does not begin anywhere the writer feels like it. The opening must be compelling and relevant to the story. The ending must flow logically from the facts; a literary newspaper article is stronger if it does more than just stop. Drake's story recapitulating the actions of John W. Hinckley Jr. ends simply but effectively. After the president has come into view and Hinckley has stepped foward, the story ends with this paragraph: "He fired."[70] Those two words end the story but continue the mood of the story, which is what a good ending should do. Crewdson ends with, "Bernabe Garay was a happy man at last," a piece of information Bernabe volunteered to Crewdson.[71] Shinoff ends this way: "Hickey took off his hat, sweater and jacket. 'The work is hard. You don't have time to think about death,' he said." And Patricia Donahue, whose story "Brutality in the Home: Abused Child Strikes Back" begins with a murder scene, ends quoting the murderer:

> Her words come slowly as she thinks about the man she killed.
> "I probably could kill somebody else. The first time was hard."
> The second time — a little easier.
> "Probably could put a little more thought into it."

Abuse of the Technique

One of the major issues in literary newswriting is the problem of writers who stress style over substance. As Walker Gibson writes: "One appreciates any effort by journalists to make the reading of the news less of a chore and a bore. Nobody wants to be dull. But if the alternative to dullness is dishonesty, it may be better to be dull."[72]

In 1981, a reporter for the *Washington Post* admitted that a story bearing her byline and the just-announced winner of the Pulitizer Prize for feature writing had been fabricated by her. The Pulitizer committee immediately gave the prize to a reporter for *The Village Voice*, and it seemed that the tragedy for Janet Cooke and the good fortune for Teresa Carpenter would end there.

But it did not. Soon people came forward to complain about one of Carpenter's stories, basing some of their objections on an unattributed sentence that suggested Carpenter had interviewed someone in prison when admittedly she had not. At the same time a columnist for the *New York Daily News* resigned after a British newspaper challenged the substance of one of his columns and after he admitted using a false name for one of the people he wrote about. On the other side of the continent, a reporter for the Associated Press resigned after admitting that an article she had written about a 200-mile-an-hour ride down a California freeway was a composite based on two rides and on interviews with other drivers. Additionally, portions of her article were virtually the same as an article in *New West* magazine.

If anything can give journalism a bad name in general and literary

newswriting in particular, it is the misuse and abuse of literary techniques to make stories sound better than they really are. In a report on the tainted Pulitizer Prize mentioned earlier, the National News Council said: "The dangers on that count have been heightened in recent years by a variety of developments that have caused many newspapers to move more and more toward magazine-model brightness in writing style and further from their traditional emphasis on hard news rooted in factuality."[73] Nothing there disputes the technique, just condemns the abuse of the technique. The abuses include composites and compressions. If the literary newswriter discovers a hole that cannot be filled honestly, the writer should admit it rather than make something up. Recall Gibson: "It may be better to be dull."

Given other newspaper practices, the criticism about the writing style is fatuous. For years newspapers have used black and white line drawings to illustrate stories and no one has given second thought that these drawings are fabrications. Cooke's story was accompanied by drawings that were based on her reporting. The artist who made the illustrations did not see the eight-year-old "shooting up," yet that is what the illustrations show. If the answer to the question is that the illustrations were only for effect, then the next question is: At what point does effect end and reality begin?

And what is reality? Journalists would claim that objectivity breeds reality. That creed is questionable. "There is no way of observing neutral facts neutrally," John M. Ellis writes. "We must decide where to look and how to abstract from what we find, and both these decisions are results of the vantage point from which we begin."[74] Most journalists would accept that, admitting then that they try to present all facts in an issue and that is as close to reality as they can come. But in literary newswriting, which allows the reader to get facts from the people in the story "unfiltered" by a reporter, is not reality approximated better (if one can approximate reality in degrees)? The stories analyzed here suggest an affirmative answer.

A further question needs to be raised: What does the journalist do when confronted with a story that cannot be told in the inverted pyramid? For example, try writing a hard news lead and following through in standard form on some of the stories analyzed here. What would it be? What attribution tag would be used? In stories that lack resolution or that are continuing stories (such as Crewdson's), the literary approach may be the best to take.

What of attribution tags? They can get in the way of a literary stylist, yet the lack of attribution tags identifying sources of information strikes at the essence of good journalism. By the same token, a proliferation of anonymous or unidentified sources has not made editors uncomfortable enough to stop the practice. Viewed in the tradition of anonymous sources, the unattributed reconstruction should not bother editors that much. Still, the absence raises a question: Is a story less journalistic because the reader does not know the source of each piece of information? After all, journalists publish the names of sources not only to protect themselves (if attributed information is false) but also to enable the

reader to evaluate information based on that reader's perception of the source.

In the Teresa Carpenter story that caused complaints is this line: "Now, from his cell at Riker's Island, Sweeney denies that they ever had a relationship." Later, she writes: "Sweeney was flattered, but could not help feeling that Lowenstien was being ironic." And later: "Sweeney began to believe his mind was being read."[75] As it turned out, Carpenter never interviewed Sweeney, but the reader is never told that in the story.[76] None of that means the preceding information is wrong, but it does raise the question about technique. Does a literary approach put more strain on the reporter and on the newspaper's credibility? Unsourced information leaves a gap through which a dishonest reporter intent on drama or effect can weasle false information.

Does not the lack of attributed sources place the literary newswriter at the mercy of sources? If sources know that the information they are about to provide will appear unattributed, what is to stop them from giving inaccurate or self-serving information? The idea is not as far-fetched as it may seem, given that hard-news journalists are dependent on sources, some of whom request anonymity for no other reason than self-interest. The question is not raised to suggest that literary newswriting needs line-by-line attribution, but to show that the practice of not always identifying sources already exists in more typical journalistic writing. Dismissing literary newswriting because it uses anonymous or unnamed sources begs the larger question.

Some scholars and literary newswriters believe that the authority for the story comes not from direct quotations or attribution tags anyway, but from the authority of the reporting. Norman Sims writes that literary journalism demands immersion that shows the author is at work and "authority shows through" in the writing.[77] Authority comes not from sources in the story but from the quality of the reporting and writing. In fact, I've already questioned direct quotations as usually being digressive and I will make a case for immersive reporting — reporting that goes well beyond what is done for the routine news story.

The questions do not come with quick and easy answers, although some suggestions do exist. One reason the writer of a literary news story might not use sources throughout is that the continued repetition gets in the way of style. Can a list of sources appear before or after the story? Would footnotes satisfy the curious and the stylist? What about modified footnotes? "If news media clearly and honestly stated the constraints under which they operate," Edward Jay Epstein says, "the adjustment would be far easier to make. Unfortunately, they tend to hide rather than explain these contraints. . . . The value of news to the public would be greatly enhanced if news organizations revealed, rather than obscured, the methods by which they select and process reality."[78]

Some newspapers are doing this. A working draft of a policy statement on ethical considerations at the *Boston Globe* contains this statement: "We should tell our readers clearly and early that the story is pieced together from interviews, documents, notes and whatever. In addition, from time to time the story should remind readers of the basis for

our material and the possible bias of the source."[79]

The *Stockton Record* series includes this comment in the upper left-hand corner of each day's opening page: "Based on more than 100 interviews and review of public documents, these stories emerged to show the major forces behind Stockton's crime rate. Names have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved."

Another approach allows a writer to begin literarily but after establishing the story line calls for phrasing such as this from a Sunday newspaper magazine article: "The Cone burglary — reconstructed here from interviews and trial transcripts — was just one in a long string of break-ins that plagued affluent North Carolina neighborhoods in 1974."[80] Whatever method is used, literary news stories will have no credibility with editors or readers if they lack some form of source identity or an external process of checking the information in the story. Some of the problems discussed go unresolved: solutions to others appear later.

But is the Result Fact?

The major obstacle that the literary newswriter faces is the charge — mostly from internal critics — that his work is not fact. That objection stems in part from the belief by journalists that what they write is truth and fact, rather than a story based on fact. But "science seems to have demonstrated," Scholes and Kellogg say, "that Aristotle's distinction between history and fiction was one of degree, not of kind. All knowing and all telling are subject to the conventions of art. Because we apprehend reality through culturally determined types, we can report the most particular event only in the form of a representational fiction . . ."[81] Davis argues that fact and fiction ". . . are more properly extremes of a continuum."[82]

"Things are not always as they seem," Lottinville says. "And telling them as they were is dependent upon structural and stylistic considerations no less than upon finding and assessing the facts."[83] And David L. Eason says: "The story does not exist in nature but must be constituted in its telling."[84] Even the City Council meeting, while to a journalist something of a discrete event, is really part of an on-going story of which the reporter's account is only a segment. But by writing that segment, the journalist creates the story that until then did not exist. Epstein, a critic of journalistic practices, says:

> The perceptions and biases of journalists assume a far more influential role in the intermediary stage of the news process: the analysis of events. Journalistic analysis involves choosing and ordering the significant aspects of the data collected about an assigned target. Surrounding almost any happening is a confusing, confounding blur of information. The journalist — who seldom, if ever, witnesses the entire event — must reconstruct it from a welter of conflicting assertions, fragments of evidence, and possibly some eyewitness accounts . . . In sifting through the data surrounding an event, the journalist must have some overall view of

> reality to help him put together a coherent picture. Some statements might be emphasized and highlighted; others, played down or omitted entirely. Indeed, the journalist often organizes the material to coincide with what he believes is the true meaning of the happening.[85]

Schudson argues that whether a news story is "story" or "information," accuracy is not an issue:

> Information journalism is not necessarily more accurate than story journalism. The two journalisms differ intrinsically, to borrow a metaphor from music, not according to what physical tones they include, but according to the dynamic quality of the tones. 'Information' aspires to the position of twelve-tone music — music without an inherent, psychologically significant order to it. The 'story,' on the other hand, plays intentionally on connections to human experience, just as seven-tone music counts on the states of tensions, unrest, and resolution it excites in listeners.[86]

Carol McCabe of the *Providence* (Rhode Island) *Journal-Bulletin* says:

> I believe that there is not as much objectivity possible in journalism as some observers feel, because as long as you have human beings selecting facts that are used, it comes through a subjective mind. A reporter expressing his feelings should never replace the plain statement of fact, but I think we need people who will go and try to explain what is beyond those facts. I think Eudora Welty described the writing process in terms of the Old Bards. The King died and then the Queen died. That's narrative. The King died and then the Queen died of grief. That's the plot. Maybe what we're talking about is narrative and plot, and what I'm trying to do is put some plot in the story.[87]

Clark adds his example of the boxing matches he used to attend in Madison Square Garden. He notes that some newspapers carried round-by-round descriptions of some fights — basically fragmented "He's up. He's down. He's up. He's down." Clark argues that the daily stream of journalism is something like those round-by-round descriptions. "Imagine reading about a prize fight one round per day for 15 days. What you miss is the moral weight of the narrative, the story of the game."[88] Clark's point is an excellent one: By using literary techniques journalists may get closer to providing a smoother and clearer story to their readers.

Eric Best of the *Stockton Record* makes a similar argument in defending a series on crime in which some of the stories, including the one analyzed for this essay, were written in a fictionalized style. Best says that one reporter criticized the series because Best and the other author of the series did not evaluate and filter the information. To that critic, the fictionalized approach meant that Best and his colleague were not exercising their gatekeeping functions:

> I disagree with that since the fictionalized approach requires more careful consideration than traditional news writing. In the latter you assume that your stricter limits on language and style reduce distortion. In fact, I think straight news writing is often

> highly distorted because it's a more extreme reduction from events to words. Once you accept that language will distort, then you have to choose what frame of language has the best chance of representing the story. In someting as complex as crime, where you don't really know what the causes and effects are, it's a given you won't capture the "truth."[89]

What Clark and Best are both saying is that a literary approach can be more valid for reader understanding of the news than other writing forms.

None of this suggests that what journalists do is false. As two critics have observed: "Whereas fiction is designed to give the illusion of reality, factual narration describes reality itself. . . . Factual narration must be true not only to human experience, as in good fiction, but to history. . . . Documentation, therefore, of one kind or another is essential to factual narration."[90] A key word in the preceding is *describes*. The critics just cited are not suggesting anything but writing based on reality, but the larger point remains the same: the result is a representation of reality, not reality itself. In an essay in *Harper's*, its editor, Lewis H. Lapham, wrote: "The confusion about the [news] media seems widely distributed, and maybe people need to be reminded that the media tell stories. There is nothing reprehensible about telling stories."[91]

Reporting Underlines the Writing

For the journalist writing literary news stories the answer lies in good reporting. Again, from the working draft of the *Boston Globe's* policy statement on ethical considerations: "Reconstruction of events is a valuable journalistic tool. The *Globe* should be extremely careful in putting such narratives together. The material should be based on reporting. Someone present, preferably more than one person and preferably a participant, should have notes or a clear memory of exactly what happened and exactly who said what."[92]

The earlier emphasis on techniques and style doesn't negate the importance of reporting. No good journalist would deny the critical role of reporting. One has to marvel not only at the time literary newswriters spend reporting their stories but also the intensity of their efforts. Mental preparation is important in the preliminary stages of literary newswriting. When McCabe was asked how she reconciled reporting and writing, she replied: "It's the good reporting that underlines the good writing. You've got to have the basic facts to build on, and then you work with language in a way that makes it not 'fancier' — I like 'plainer.'"[93]

In general, any event a reporter can verify or observe in progress (smuggling of aliens, digging of graves, burying of a narcotics investigator) can provide the substance for a literary framework. Whatever the event, though, the reporting effort must be Herculean. A good writer is not enough for a literary news story. "Pity the stylist without a story, lost in the mires of self-expression," Surmelian says. "The style cannot replace the action, nor the action replace the style."[94] Clark, who also worked as a reporter for the *St. Petersburg Times*, says:

"My greatest lesson as a journalist, and I have incorporated it into my teaching, is the importance of reporting. Without it, there is no good writing."[95] And Hollowell makes the point that literarily-styled writing "requires extensive research and even more careful reporting than does the typical news article."[96] One newspaper feature writer can even put a figure on how much reporting has to be done. "You have to know five times as much as you're ever going to use in the story," say Cynthia Gorney of the *Washington Post*.[97] (Reading that, a former Washington reporter turned journalism professor and journalism ethicist put the figure at ten.)

The amount of time the journalists whose stories were studied herein spent reporting on their stories varies from one day to one year (three if you count time spent acquiring background knowledge). Richard Ben Cramer, who estimates his reporting time on the Sadat funeral at twenty hours, points out that he had been in Egypt many times before the funeral and had written stories about Sadat and Egypt. "You can't put a time on that," he says. [98] Wolf's funeral story was preceded by related work on the dead police officer's life, and she had read other stories about him before attending his funeral. "I had an idea what kind of man he was," she says, "and therefore what kind of man filled that job."[99]

The thirteen-member team reporting effort reflected in Drake's story is not without precedent. Major news events often require the reporting skills of many people and the centralized writing by one. The reporting time for the Drake story: forty-eight hours.

Sager's reporting time included one day in which he attended a cattle sale and talked to several farmers, the mayor, some townspeople, and the county extension agent, who set up his visit to the Smith farm, where he spent an entire day reporting. Crewdson's three weeks included waiting for something to happen, time that cannot be discounted in any literary newswriting enterprise.

Donahue used public records wherever she could to reconstruct the life of Faye, the murderer. At one point in the story, Donahue writes: "Not all of Faye's childhood was unhappy. She loved school. Most of her grades were As and Bs. She especially liked math. It always made sense — one and one always made two." To write that, Donahue checked court records and interviewed Faye and her mother separately (Faye and her mother did not talk to each other between interviews, Donahue says). Additionally, Donahue attempted to check school records, but Faye's grammar school had been torn down and her records were not available.[100]

Finally, Gaul's reporting gets a mention not only for the length of time (a year) but also because he applied a seldom-used reporting method — suing for data under the federal Freedom of Information Act. Again, all good reporting requires documentation.

The journalists cited here are equally adamant not only about good reporting but also about getting essential details and description so they can write a good story. "I gather all the detail I can," Sager says, "from the size and construction of silos to eye color to the exact number of days it takes corn to grow to maturity, to . . . whatever . . . I report my

stories to death."

Summary and Conclusions

Literary newswriting is the marriage of depth reporting and literary techniques in newspaper writing. Among those techniques are narration and scene, summary and process, point of view, drama, chronological organization, rhythm, imagery, foreshadowing, metaphor, irony, dialogue, overall organization (begining, middle and end) — all girded by good reporting. The resulting story represents the reality of something as reported and written by one or several reporters. Literary newswriting is not a question of fiction or nonfiction. "The distinction between fiction and nonfiction, epistemologically shaky at best, should in no way be called on to justify any distinction between literature and journalism, or literature and non-literature," Murphy said.[101]

Literary newswriting is centuries old. Once used more frequently in nineteenth century newspapers, the writing style was subsequently used only in stories on newspaper feature pages. After the attention given to new journalism in the 1970s began to wane, journalists began using literary techniques in stories usually labeled hard news. Literary newswriting is now reappearing on the front pages of newspapers.

Journalists who use literary techniques attempt to replicate reality. They try to tell how something happened and to convey the feel of events. Journalists use literary techniques as a way of giving shape to the facts of an untidy world. "Stories move from truths to facts, not the other way around," Lapham writes, "and the tellers of tales endeavor to convey the essence of a thing."[102]

Some of the objections raised about literary newswriting can also be raised about "straight" newswriting. All news stories are filtered through a reporter who frequently fits the facts gathered to a story line. Because "straight" newswriting represents an extreme reduction from events to words, literary newswriting presents itself as a better frame for the writer to wrap around the information gathered. Because literary newswriting does not always use the conventional methods of source identification, it requires thorough verification and documentation during the reporting process. Without good reporting, literary newswriting cannot exist.

Literary newswriting is just now becoming more accepted in the hard news sections of newspapers. Says Clark, an English professor turned newspaper writing coach: "I foresee a great time ahead for newspaper writing. We have purged ourselves of the abuses of the new journalism: the self-indulgent overwriting, the composite characters, the interior monologues. But we have absorbed into everyday news reporting many of the useful techniques of that movement: setting scenes, using perspective, letting characters speak, using meaningful detail."[103] Adds Donald M. Murray, a Pulitzer prize winner for editorial writing turned English professor: ". . . the daily newspaper is extending its range of topics and varying the manner in which those topics are reported and written. The newspaper is becoming, stylistically, much more in-

teresting . . .[104] It is on that footing that literary newswriting is developing.

NOTES

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10. Monday, Oct. 5, 1981, pp. B1, B3.
11. Sunday, Sept. 27, 1981, pp. B1, B4.
12. Thursday, April 2, 1981, pp. 1, 6-8.
13. Wednesday, Dec. 10, 1980, p. 17 (a section front).
14. Friday, March 20, 1981.
15. Tuesday, July 21, 1981, p. 4 (part of a double-truck that could be removed for later reading).
16. Sunday, Oct. 1, 1981, pp. 1, 18.
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20. Murphy, p. 27.
21. *Treasury, passim* (My favorite is "Dreyfus hears the mob cry: 'Death to the traitor!'", pp. 231-35. Equally compelling is Stephen Crane's narrative of the death of a marine surgeon at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, on pp. 237-40; Henry G. Wales' account of the execution of Mata Hari on pp. 355-58, and Ben Hecht's initial story of a man who set up the murder of his wife, pp. 374-77.)
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48. Scholes and Kellog, p. 244.
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50. Booth, p. 158.
51. David Halberstram, *The Powers That Be* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), p. 161.
52. Russell B. Nye, "History and Literature: Branches of the Same Tree" in Robert H. Bremner, ed., *Essays on History and Literature* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1966), p. 137.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
54. Lottinville, pp. 49-50.
55. Surmelian, p. 32.
56. Nicolaus Mills, ed., *The New Journalism: A Historical Anthology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), p. xiv.
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58. Rodger Streitmatter, "AIDS: 'It's just a matter of time'," *The Quill*, May 1984, p. 26.
59. Surmelian, p.10.
60. Tom Wolfe, *The New Journalism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) p. 50.
61. *Ibid.*
62. Surmelian, p. 31.
63. *Ibid.*
64. J. Michael Sproule, *Argument: Language and Its Influence* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1980), p. 324.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 325.
66. Booth, p. 175.
67. Booth, p. 169.
68. Letter to the author from Gilbert M. Gaul, May 16, 1981. All information later attributed to how Gaul reported and wrote the story comes from this letter.
69. Surmelian, p. 68.
70. Drake plotted this story. He said he wanted to develop tension at the beginning to propel the reader. He wrote knowing that the readers knew what happened but would stay with the story to see how Hinckley did it. Max Hall of the Associated Press writes approvingly of this tension-resolution approach. "Suppose a baseall game is broken up by a home run in the ninth inning. The writer reports that fact in his lead — the top-heavy treatment. But somewhere in the body of the story, he makes a detailed narrative out of the events in the ninth inning leading up to the climax. And if he handles it well, there is a certain suspense about it. It is not the 'whodunit' kind of suspense which would exist if the reader were in the dark as to the outcome. It is the kind of suspense that has been aptly called 'waiting for the expected.' Here, truly, is a formidable weapon for resting the domination

of the 'inverted pyramid.'" From: "The Shape of the Story," in Lyons, ed., *Reporting The News*, p. 281. Hall's article is dated 1950. More recently, Roy Peter Clark of the Poynter Institute for Media Studies in St. Petersburg, Florida, has advocated a similar approach, which he calls the "hourglass." See "A New Shape for the News," *Washington Journalism Review*, March 1984.

71. Letters to the author from John M. Crewdson. Dec. 31, 1980, and Dec. 28, 1981. All information describing how Crewdson reported and wrote the story comes from these letters.
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82. Davis, p. 9.
83. Lottinville, p. 3.
84. David L. Eason, "Telling Stories and Making Sense," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 15:2:126 (1981).
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86. Schudson, p. 119.
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